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ABSTRACT

A survey of a 20 percent random sample of principals in Maryland public elementary schools produced 91 usable returns (for a 54 percent response rate). Data were collected on seven study areas. For each area, this report presents a brief description of the area, a discussion of important findings, and a short summary. The seven areas consisted of (1) principals' personal characteristics, including age, sex, race or ethnic group, job title, political philosophy and party, retirement plans, and job security feelings; (2) school and school district characteristics, such as size, composition, staff, structure, morale, subordinate and superordinate relationships, teacher transfers, commendations, innovation sources, and special education programs; (3) experience and preparation for the principalship; (4) salary, benefits, work year and week, attitude toward principals' collective bargaining, and written or unwritten contracts; (5) principals' role in administration, including budget, personnel, and instructional program, plus their degree of influence and authority and their evaluations; (6) attitudes toward 32 problems internal and external to schools, such as enrollment decline or staff dismissals; and (7) attitudes toward educational developments, including student development and behavior, the administrative team concept, and busing. (RW)

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SUMMARY REPORT

The Maryland Elementary School Principalship in 1982:

A Research Study

Conducted by the Center for
Educational Research and Development
University of Maryland (College Park)
in association with the
Maryland Association of Elementary
School Administrators

May, 1982

EA 015 418

Introduction

This research study of the Maryland elementary school principal and principalship was designed so as to be comparable to the 1978 survey of principals which was conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. The instrument used in the national study was revised where necessary to account for conditions in the State.

This survey included a 20% random sample of principals in Maryland public schools. Survey instruments were mailed to approximately 170 principals. Returns were received from 103 principals, but only 91 were complete enough to be used in the study.

The survey was designed to elicit information in seven areas:

-The status of the principal (personal characteristics.)

-The school and school district in which the principal served.

-Experience and preparation for the principalship.

-Salary and other benefits.

-Principal's role in administration.

-Problems of the principal.

-Developments in education.

Each area survey is briefly described in the report that follows.

This summary report includes a brief description of the area of study, the important findings for that area, and a brief summary of the area. Data are reported on a Statewide basis and no mention is made of individual schools or school district.

The researchers are indebted to those principals who took the time to complete a long survey instrument and the National Association for its permission to edit and copy the survey instrument for use in this study.

A. Status of the Principal

Description of the Area Study

This section of the survey dealt with the personal characteristics of principals in Maryland. It dealt with the demographics of age, sex, marital status, race or ethnicity, and job title. It also attempted to develop an understanding of the principals' political philosophy and party choice, professional memberships, retirement plans, feelings of security and nature of the job.

Findings

With very little variation, the title principal is bestowed upon elementary school administrators by their school systems. In only two cases (2%) was the title teaching principal used. This is in keeping with the national trend and reflects an evolution of the elementary school principal towards a more significant administrative role.

The median age of the Maryland principal is slightly higher (49) than the median age of principals nationally (46). The sex ratio of males to females in the State (3:2) represents a much better balance than the national ratio of almost 4:1. About 11% of Maryland's principals are Black, 88% are White, and less than 1% are other (Hispanic, native American, etc.). These percentages are comparable to the national figures for our geographic area.

Over two-thirds of the principals indicate a preference for political conservatism. In terms of party preference, Democrats led Republicans by a two to one margin. Over 97% reported voting in the last presidential election.

Job security appears not to be a problem for Maryland principals. Approximately 80% of our sample indicated they felt very secure and another 17% reported they were fairly secure. Less than 3% professed to feeling insecure about their jobs.

While there was wide variance in the planned age of retirement--ranging from less than 50 to over 65 years of age--the median planned retirement age (56) is only six to seven years above the current median age of principals. This suggests that Maryland's replacement needs in this manpower area will be great over the next 5 to 10 years.

Summary

The status of Maryland elementary principals, based on the characteristics surveyed, can be described as ranging from good to excellent. Maryland appears to lead the nation slightly (remember we were comparing 1982 Maryland data with 1978 national data) in a number of important categories and falls importantly behind in none.

The single concern which these data raise is the fact that Maryland has a very veteran administrative force at the elementary school level that is anticipating retirement in six to seven years (on the average). This suggests that the replacement needs will be great during the next ten years and, given the current population information, could mean as many as 100 or more principals per year in the near future.

B. The School and School District

Description of Area

This section of the report requested information that describes the school and school district with respect to size and composition. Data was obtained on school size and composition, school district size and composition, and staff size and composition. Data was also requested relative to the principal's morale, relationships with other administrators and teachers, and sources of ideas for innovation.

Much of the data obtained in this section will be used in the analysis of the other sections and hence will not be discussed in this summary report.

Findings

Demographic data on school size and composition, staff size and composition and school district size and composition produced no real surprizes. These data are regularly collected in Maryland and are readily available from other sources.

Maryland principals typically administer to the needs of a single school and school community which is only slightly larger (450 pupil median size) than the national median of 430 pupils. In contrast to the national picture, Maryland's school districts tend to be large and as a consequence Maryland elementary principals are part of a large and frequently highly sophisticated administrative structure. As such they received both the advantages and disadvantages generally associated with large administrative organizations.

There tends to be a uniform structure to Maryland elementary schools, K-6 for the most part. There are some K-5 structures in those systems that employ the middle school concept.

The more significant findings in this section relate to those data which reflect principals' morale and relationships. In Maryland, almost all principals describe their own morale as either excellent or good (93%). At the same

time over 25% describe the morale of system counterparts as bad. This figure is almost double that (13%) reported in the national study. We have no data to explain this phenomena.

Principals describe their relationships with their teachers as either very good (65%) or good (35%). Not a single principal in our study made an entry in the poor or very poor categories. Principals likewise indicated that they have fairly satisfactory relationships with their superintendents (very good 38%; good 48%, and poor 12%), but that principal/school board relationships are not very satisfactory. Less than 15% reported "very good" relationships and another 48% reported relationships as being "good." However, 37% reported them as being "poor" to "very poor."

The problem of "transferring" ineffective teachers to give them another chance does not seem to be a serious problem for principals. Less than one principal in five reported a concern in this area and those who had a concern indicated it was generally limited to a single teacher.

Principals were asked to indicate the frequency with which they were commended, either in writing or in person, by some one from the central staff, for something they had done. They indicated that such action occurs somewhere between sometimes and seldom. While 17% reported "frequent" commendation (the national figure was 13%), over 40% indicated they were "seldom" commended.

When questioned about their primary source of ideas for innovations that help to strengthen their schools, principals credited other principals and teachers and, to a lessser degree, local workshops. State and national conferences and college courses were not seen as important sources of ideas.

Over 60% of the principals felt that their school had an outstanding program of special education. This figure, which seemed high to us, is almost identical to the 59% reported nationally.

Summary

This section of the survey reveals a fairly healthy state of affairs in Maryland elementary schools. Morale appears to be high among principals generally and relationships, with exception of principal/board relations appear to be good. The data on idea sources is no surprize--craft or practitioner--knowledge still seems to be more valuable than "book knowledge" in producing change and improvement. What is surprizing is the fact that 60% of principals describe their program for handicapped students as outstanding. Less than a decade ago we were saying that less than 1 in 4 was adequate.

C. The Principalship: Experience and Preparation for the Position

Description of Area

Eight questions were raised to principals to secure their impressions as to what the nature and value of the experiences and formal training that comprised their preparation for the principalship. Several of the items were structured to develop information on both the preservice and inservice dimensions.

Findings

Over 50% of the principals in our sample had 10 or more years experience in the principalship and almost half of that number had over 16 years of experience. Most of that experience had been in Maryland public schools and for a vast majority of principals (over 80%) the experience had been in a single district. Maryland's principals appear to be less mobile than their counterparts in the national survey, both on an inter and intra-state basis.

Over half of Maryland's principals had 10 or more years experience as a classroom teacher prior to assuming the principalship. Only two indicated that they had no elementary teaching experience. This is in striking contrast to the national as a whole where 18% enter the principalship without this valued experience.

The master's degree is the highest earned degree for over 80% of our sample. Approximately 14% report an earned doctorate and the remaining 6% state they hold a two year certificate. The percentage of doctoral degrees nationally was less than 5% but two year certificates, a certification requirement in a number of states, reached 17%. Maryland had no bachelor's only but the nation showed a 4% figure for that as the highest earned degree.

The types of preparation and experience most valued by Maryland principals were experience as a teacher, experience as an assistant principal, and on-the-

job-experience as a principal. The internship was valued highly by the limited number who had that experience. Graduate study, and local, State and national workshops were valued less. In the national study experience as a teacher and on-the-job-experience were rated higher than the others.

Summary

Maryland principals appear to be well prepared for their roles by national standards. They do not differ markedly in what they valued as preparatory activity, but they do seem to have had more, especially elementary classroom teaching, of that which was valued.

D. Salary and Other Benefits

Description of Area

Fifteen questions were asked of Maryland principals relative to salary and other job benefits. In addition the survey looked at the work requirements of the position in terms of the length of the work week and year.

Findings

The work year for Maryland principals was a 12 month appointment for over 85% of those who answered that question. Only in a few of the middle size and some of the smaller districts is the term less than tweleve months. Principals in those districts reported a scattering of 11 (5% for the entire sample) and 10 (9% for the sample) month contracts. There were no 9 month contracts reported.

Nationally only 30% of the principals are on a 12 month appointment. Another 19% reported they held 11 month appointments and over 43% reported 10 month contracts. Seven percent reported their contract was for a nine month period.

These data are further evidence of the importance the State attaches to the principalship. It is a distinction that needs both the appreciation and protection of all who value elementary public education.

Maryland principals, like those elsewhere in the nation, report a work week in excess of 45 hours. A large number of our sample reported work weeks in excess of 50 hours.

While the median salary of principals nationally was $21,500 in 1978, Marylanders--four years later--reported a mean salary in excess of $30,000. Slightly less than 40% of our sample reported a salary in excess of $35,000 and the low salary reported was in excess of $20,000. The 1978 national high salary was 35,900 and the low was $6,000. The fact that Marylander principals

labor for 12 months in most cases, and the fact that there is a four year difference in the data years should help to dispell the belief that Maryland principals are overpaid. On the other hand, principals should view with some pride the importance the systems attach to their work in terms of both salary and length of contract.

Our survey indicates that Maryland principals work without a written individual contract. Most indicate that they bargain in some manner with the board and superintendent for salary and fringe benefits. Others participate in meet-and-confer sessions to hammer out salary issues.

A majority of the principals (over 60%) indicated a preference for formal collective negotiations to determine salary, benefits, and working conditions.

Principals reported high percentages in the areas of fringe benefits surveyed. Over 90% indicated the availability of sabbatical leaves; 85% stated they received a paid vacation; 95% stated they have a group life plan; and 80% indicated they are included under liability coverage. All of these figures are generally above the national medians.

Summary

Salary, fringe benefits and working conditions for Maryland elementary principals compare favorably with national averages. Maryland principals do have a longer work year than their national counterparts, but their work week appears to be only slightly longer.

Both the quality of the benefits and the length of the contract are seen as reflecting the importance that State and local leaders attached to the principalship.

E. Principal's Role in Administration

Description of Data

The principal's role in such administrative task areas as budget, personnel, and program were examined along with the principal's influence in decision making, the relationship between authority and responsibility, and the methods by which principals are evaluated.

Findings

Principals expressed mixed views, even within systems, on whether or not they had influence on school district decisions that affect elementary schools and elementary education. Slightly over half (51%) felt they had a large degree of influence while 43% stated their influence was little. The remaining six percent divided evenly between the scale extremes of much and none. One explanation for this difference could be that influence is more a function of personality than role. At least this would help to explain within system differences.

Principals were more decisive on the question as to whether authority was commensurate with responsibility. Over 65% indicated it was, while slightly less than 35% stated it was not. Less than 1% indicated they weren't sure. Whether one is discussing influence or authority, Maryland principals rated themselves below the national average. Principals nationally felt that the authority/responsibility balance was correct by a 4 to 1 ratio and 3 out of 4 felt they had "much" to "some" influence in decisions affecting elementary education. The fact that Maryland principals function in relatively large systems with large central, and sometimes regional, office staffs may account for the decrease in authority and influence expressed by our sample.

In the national study low assessments of influence and authority were frequently associated with low morale. This explanation is questionable for our sample since the morale of principals was universally high.

Principals were asked to define their authority and responsibility in three task areas: budget, personnel, and program. The responses indicate that elementary principals feel they have little or no budetary descretion, some personnel selection authority, and primary supervision of instruction responsibility. Put another way, principals appear to have little authority over essential dimensions of program resources but primary responsibility for the results.

When we compare Maryland principals with the national sample of principals we find important differences. While over 90% of Maryland principals have primary responsibility for the instructional program, the national percentage was given as 75%. Where faculty selection was viewed by over 87% of the principal surveyed nationally, as being cooperative, only 63% of our sample felt it was a cooperative venture. The national study provided no data on the budget question. In our case, the range of answers made analysis difficult in terms of obtaining a reliable clustering of cases. Also, over 21% of our sample indicated that they did not know what their discretionary powers were with respect to budget.

All of Maryland principals indicate that there is a formal system for evaluation. Evaluations are conducted regularly and the person responsible for conducting the evaluation is generally an assistant superintendent. Only in smaller Maryland's districts does the superintendent participate in the evaluation process.

Summary

There are several sharp contrasts between the role of principals nationally and the role of principals in Maryland. In Maryland, principals appear to be more in charge (at least more responsbile) for educational decisions within their own schoosl, than is the picture nationally, but they seem to have less

authority and responsibility for educational decisions external to the school. These differences are in all probability related in some way to the control mechanisms of large enterprizes and principals in Maryland appear to be comfortable with the arrangement.

F. Problems of the Principal

Description of Data

Principals were provided with a list of 32 problems and were asked to indicate whether each was (1) a serious problem, (2) a problem, or (3) little or no problem. The problem list included items which were internal to the operation of the school as well as those which were of an external nature which had an affect on what took place in the school.

Findings

Our first analysis was to total all 2,912 responses (32 problems with one response per problem times 91 principals who responded to these items) in order to obtain a "global perspective" of the intensity of problems in Maryland schools. This analysis revealed that over 75% of the responses (2,190 out of a possible 2,902) were in the little or no response category; approximately 20% of the responses (574) were in the "problem" category; and only 5% (150) were in the "serious" problem category.

When we looked at the problem categories that had the largest number of "serious" and "problem" category responses, we found that they fell, for the most part, in that category of items which were external to the school and beyond the principal's control. These included such items as declining enrollments, dealing with reduced fiscal resources, staff reductions, and complying with externally imposed student record regulations.

The major problem area reported by Maryland principals, which was internal to the school setting, was also the number one problem in the national survey--dismissing incompetent staff.

Many of the problem areas which seem to plague the society in general were seen as "little or no problem" in the State's elementary schools. Areas such

as use of drugs and alcohol by students and staff, management of student behavior problems, dealing with absenteeism of students and staff, vandalism and violence in the schools, school gangs, and entrusion by out-of-school gangs, were all viewed as being "little or no problem."

Summary

While our analysis of the data to this point is somewhat incomplete, the overwhelming finding is that Maryland elementary schools are relatively problem free and that the areas that do provide difficulty for principals are not within their sphere of control.

G. Developments in Education

Introduction

A total of twenty-seven questions were used to assess principals' reactions to developments in education. Major items examined were the administrative team concept, the status of collective bargaining, and the development and well-being of elementary students. Three questions were used to address the busing issue.

Findings

Maryland principals expressed the belief that student development and behavior is generally better today than it was five years ago. They felt that students were learning more (78%); that they were doing better in the basic skills area (63%); that they were either gaining (47%) or remaining the same (49%) in the area of standardized achievement measures; and that behavior was better (44%) or about the same(40%). Only 1% of respondents felt students were learning less and only 6% felt they were doing worse in basic skills. Less than 5% saw students declining on achievement scores and only 16% saw a decline in behavior.

Nationally over 11% felt students were learning less and over 15% saw a decline in basic skills. Another 13% indicated that students lost on achievement scores and 26% evidenced a decline in pupil behavior. Not only are Maryland students of today doing better--in the eyes of principals at least--than they were five years ago, but they are also doing better than students nationally.

For some reason a large number of principals choose not to respond to the questions on the administrative team. Those who did (60% of our sample) indicated that the concept is operative in their district and that it is used in dealing with issues in labor management relations (50%) as well as with curriculum and instruction issues (95%). An overwhelming majority (80%) believe it has strengthened the administration of the school system and about 90% indicated that elementary principals are included on the administrative team in their

system. Over 60% of the principals indicate that they personally have not been included.

The issue of collective bargaining does not seem to be of high priority to Maryland principals. While a number (43% of our sample) feel it has had some bad effects, an equally large percentage recognize it as having little effect. A smaller percentage feel it has done some good. Only in the area of its adverse effects on public opinion did a majority of our sample (54%) see it as a problem.

Perhaps principals' concern for collective bargaining by teachers has been modified by their own need to use this strategy. Over 60% of our sample indicated that they favor collective bargaining for principals and most indicate that it has been beneficial to the salary and welfare of principals.

Busing does not seem to be an issue among Maryland principals. Most indicate that busing has not benefitted the education of children, either those being bused or those not bused. Principals indicate that the appropriate answer is that it has made "no difference" in the schools.

Summary

Of the educational developments we studied, two appear to be of high importance to elementary principals and two seem to be in the realm of indifference. Principals appear to value the administrative team concept and see it as strengthening the administrative structure of their systems. Principals also appear to be endorsing collective bargaining for themselves.

At the same time principals seem not be concerned about the issue of busing and they seem just as relaxed about the issue of collective bargaining for teachers.

The major finding in this section is the positive view of principals relative to the entire question of student development. Principals consistently reported that today's students are doing better in every category than were students of five years ago.